

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of
theological
reflection
from Metropolitan
Community Church

JANUARY—MARCH, 1980

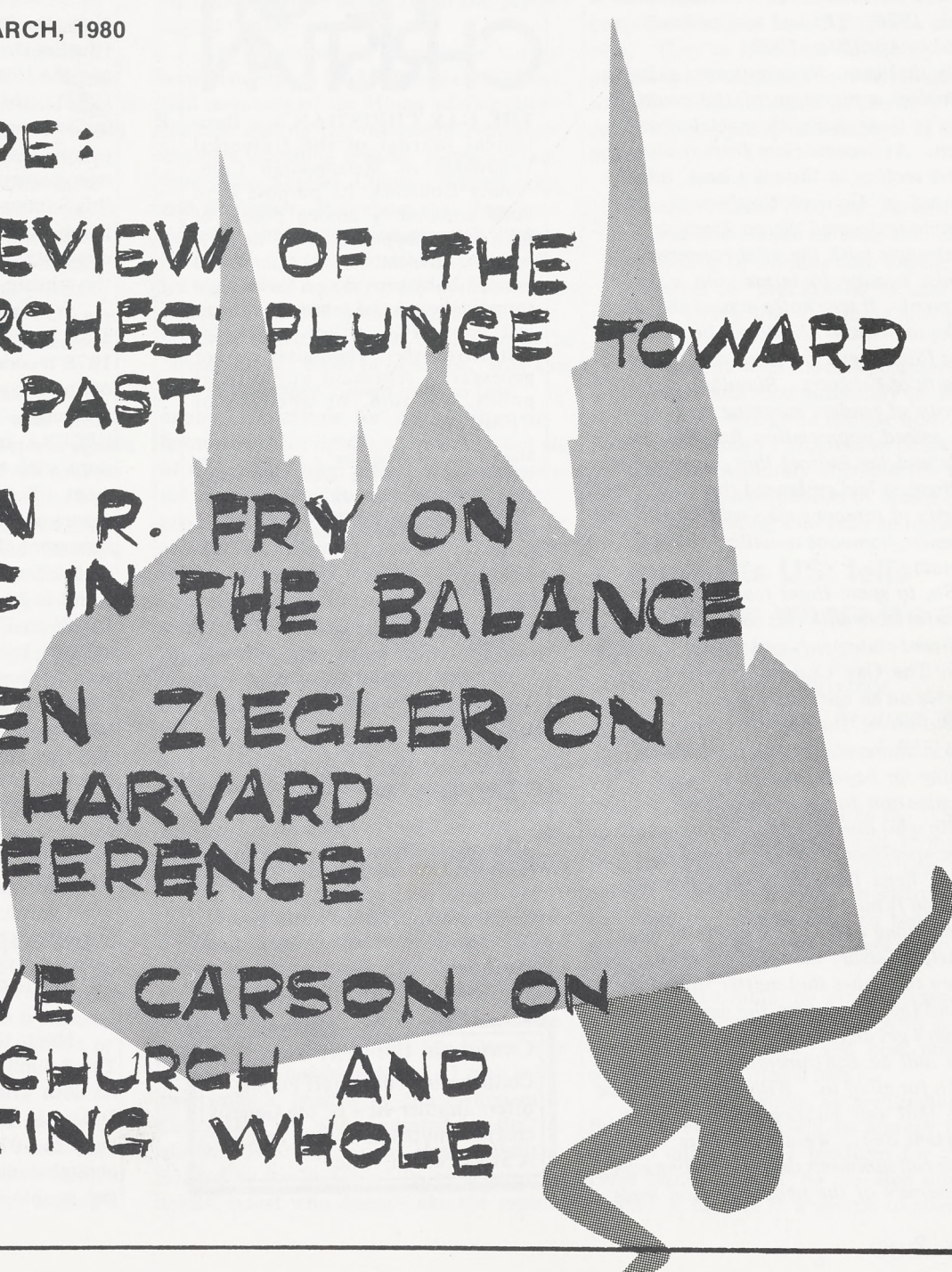
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A letter from the editor

WITH THIS ISSUE, The Gay Christian becomes a separate journal on its own, published independently of UFMCC's other magazine IN UNITY.

The Gay Christian began in New York, where in the early 1970's Roy Birchard decided such a forum for reflection was an idea worth selling the Board of his church, MCC/New York. It became the journal of the Northeast District, and remained so until General Conference, 1975. Then, it became a publication of UFMCC. Its first issue as a section of IN UNITY appeared in March, 1976. Its last serious issue appeared in April/May 1979.

In that issue, there appeared a daring theological exploration of the creation myths of Genesis and their relationship to sexism. As became clear from reading the Letters section in the next issue, which appeared at General Conference, not everyone welcomed Karen Ziegler's scholarly struggle with the vital concerns of a feminist coming to terms with a sexist document. It was hotly argued that such articles undermine the dogmatic authority of the Church and the Bible and therefore the faith of believers. Simultaneously, a majority of readers speaking up on the issue voiced appreciation for both the article and the journal that published it. For them, it had embraced the intellectual integrity of someone who values truth and wholeness, someone unwilling to switch off her brain.

So, to spare those readers who are uncomfortable with this soundingboard for significant statements and inquiry on vital issues, The Gay Christian will now be available on an optional basis.

But more, The Gay Christian will now enjoy a more sharply defined focus, reaching far beyond the parameters of a denomination to speak to and for people of faith who don't want to remain stuck in the perspectives of their yesterdays, who, instead, heed the call of God into an unknown future.

A strong and diverse editorial board will help us assure that these pages deeply explore the issues that matter to you and me, and that they cover the news you need and can't get anywhere else in one place. There will be controversy here. And growth for all of us. Without apology, we assert that our publication is a most important one. We are pioneers. Our unique call summons us to the cutting edge. The journey of the people of God leads

us to where we have never been before, and we cannot be permitted a back seat. That is the joyful burden of those convinced that the Spirit has not ceased to speak in the church.

We invite you to listen, and reflect, with The Gay Christian.

FJD

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

THE GAY CHRISTIAN is a theological journal of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Its purpose is to build community among people of faith who happen also to be gay, women, or members of other sexual minorities by providing a theological soundingboard and relevant ecumenical news. TGC writers speak for themselves; their viewpoints do not necessarily represent any official policy, position, or doctrine of UFMCC.

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Coming in the next issue:

Contributing editor Jeff Pulling offers another view of the Genesis creation myths in "Adam and Eve: A Story for All Time."

In the church

AGAINST A GROWING recognition among the general populace that gay people and women are human beings and may even be children of God, the churches this Summer and Fall handed patriarchy and obscurantism a series of smashing triumphs. Herein, the new *The Gay Christian* sets forth to summarize these developments.

Presbyterians bar gays

First, there were the Presbyterians. Now, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (the Southern one, with 800,000 members) and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (the Northern faction, with 2.6 million members) haven't enjoyed such ecumenical good feelings since they split over slavery more than a century ago. But this Summer they agreed. And adopted as policy last year's UPCUSA statement opposing the ordination of gay people to the ministry, or as elders and deacons.

You may remember that UPCUSA Task Force study on homosexuality in 1978 recommending, after many months of intensive study, that gay people be ordained. The General Assembly of UPCUSA, of course, replaced its conclusions with the anti-gay ordination statement. The PCUS had also produced a report of its own, more moderate than the statement the two denominations agreed on this Summer. But the final statement won't be binding on PCUS congregations. It will on UPCUSA churches -- or so it appears, but that won't be certain until the ecclesiastical courts get a test case. The two denominations held concurrent general assemblies in Kansas City.

Gay Presbyterians won one concession this year from UPCUSA. The 1979 assembly voted for the first time to receive the annual report of Presbyterians for Gay Concerns. For the four previous years, UPCUSA had refused the PGC report.

Episcopalians bar gays

34 Bishops Dissent

Next, there were the Episcopalians. The 2.8 million member communion held its 66th Triennial General Convention in Denver in September. Last Triennial had been in 1976, when a committee was commissioned to study the ordination of gay people. The committee report was

rc hes: plunging toward the past

turned into a formal resolution for submission to this Fall's convention. It said, in part:

There should be no barrier to the ordination of those homosexual persons who are able and willing to conform their behavior to that which the church affirms as wholesome

It was an attempt, according to committee chair Robert Spears, Bishop of Rochester, "not to pursue a legislative solution to the problem," but to allow decisions about the ordination of homosexuals to be made on an individual basis at the diocesan level. The resolution would have ordered clergy "not to promote or foster a homosexual adaptation as a generally acceptable alternative." But it would have urged against "legislation which singles out a particular human condition and makes of it an absolute barrier to ordination." Integrity, the gay Episcopal organization, hadn't decided how to respond to all this.

A hearing on homosexuality and ordination packed a theatre with 1,500 people. Thirty-two witnesses spoke against legislation banning gays and lesbians from ordination; only four spoke for the legislation. Then, surprising many observers, the House of Bishops approved, 99-34, a new resolution prepared by the Bishops' Committee on Ministry that not only bars the ordination of practicing homosexuals, but bars the ordination of anyone who engages in sex outside of marriage. A group of bishops led by John Krumm of Southern Ohio signed a conscience statement saying they couldn't abide by the resolution.

Here's what the House of Bishops said, in part:

We reaffirm the traditional teaching of the Church on marriage, marital fidelity and sexual chastity. . . Therefore, we believe it isn't appropriate for this Church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage

The House of Deputies, made up of laity and priests, took up the resolution after its own Ministry Committee deleted the final sentence absolutely barring

practicing homosexuals and anyone else sexually active outside of marriage from ministry. The Deputies began by restoring the prohibition, as quoted above, 147-47, and then proceeded to adopt the entire Bishops' resolution. A number of amendments aimed at softening the effect of the resolution were shouted down on voice votes.

Unmistakably pleased, a Southern Virginia clergy-type said: "I consider homosexuality to be a cultural and psychological tragedy."

The Statement of Conscience has by now been signed by 34 Bishops and about 200 members of the House of Deputies. Bishops signing the document represent dioceses including Boston, Newark, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Rochester. It declares that there's no evidence that many homosexuals "have been given the very special and extraordinary grace" of healthy celibacy. It asserts that the "formed personalities" of this minority of persons doesn't conform to the "predominant mode of behavior. Why this is so is a mystery known only to God." It expresses gratitude for the ministry of homosexuals in Episcopal ministry, not all of whom have been celibate. Of homosexual relationships, it adds, "From such relationships we cannot believe God to be absent." It affirms, also, the "responsible, caring, and non-exploitative struggles" of such persons "in more transient relationships." The dissenting bishops charge that the General Convention action makes of homosexuals "second-class citizens in the church of their baptism." It concludes, "We give notice that as we are answerable before almighty God that we cannot accept these recommendations or implement them in our dioceses."

Anglican report favorable

The Church of England has published a report asserting that homosexual relationships can be justified and recommending that homosexuals not be barred from the priesthood. The report, which goes to the General Synod in 1981 for debate, was produced by a committee of 11 men and two women, headed by the Bishop of Gloucester. It was requested by the church's Board for Social Responsibility, headed by the Bishop of Truro, a staunch traditionalist who doesn't like the report.

If it becomes policy, the recommendation will give bishops authority to ordain or employ gay priests and deacons, or to decline to do so.

Disciples bar gays

Or Do They?

And then there were the Disciples of Christ, here and there better known as the Christian Church. They had their biennial General Assembly in St. Louis in November. The Disciples have 1.2 million members. They've launched on a six-year project that's supposed to result in merger with the United Church of Christ. Their Assembly produced this ambiguous statement:

Recent studies have not convinced us nor the church at large that the ordaining of persons who engage in homosexual practices is in accord with God's will for the Church.

Consistent with Disciples preference for diversity and local autonomy (a denomination broad enough to include both Jim Jones and Chicago's progressive University Church), the Assembly affirmed the right of regions or congregations to take responsibility for deciding who shall be ordained.

Pope visits US: tells Americans where it's at

Bars Gays, Women, Contraceptives, Divorce, Abortion, Fooling Around, and Euthenasia; Says Nuns' Place in Habit

Finally, the Pope came to the U.S. to tell American Catholics to quit trying to change things. Having assured that no women would be involved in distributing communion, he was ready to begin his mission among adulating masses in several Eastern Cities.

In Philadelphia, he made a speech about how he'd never put up with the ordination of women, and how nuns should wear traditional habits.

In Chicago, where an architectural firm was engaged solely to arrange the 60,000 mums on the platform for the Papal Mass in a park, he repeated other themes of his trip in a speech to some

American Bishops. He praised them for their stand on the "indissolubility" of marriage, their opposition to a woman's right to choose in the matter of abortion, and this: "Sexual intercourse is a moral and human good only within marriage. Outside marriage it is wrong." Then, "ratifying the teaching of" the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, he came out against contraception.

Then he addressed homosexuality, approvingly quoting a statement by the bishops:

Homosexual activity . . . as distinguished from homosexual orientation, is morally wrong.

The distinction is clear in all five languages in which the transcript was available to TGC. Here's the hitch: The Pope didn't bother emphasizing the distinction or speaking up for the civil rights of gay and lesbian people, even though the City Council was embroiled in a bitter debate over a gay rights ordinance at the time. We saw the Chicago visit firsthand. In this heavily Catholic city with a massive Polish community, even customarily cynical newscasters got uncritically gushy. No one protested except Madilyn Murray O'Hair. Assuming that no one else in Chicago would object to John Paul's pronouncements, the religion editor of the *Chicago Tribune* wanted to know if we would be joining her. A gay bar advertised an afternoon of special music in the Pope's honor.

Then came Washington. The Pope drew a crowd almost as big as the National March for Gay and Lesbian Rights - but more press. On the night of Oct. 6, NBC news cameras skillfully avoided ever allowing the sight of 200 protesters outside the Apostolic Delegation, where the Pope was staying, to assault viewers' tender sensibilities. They were holding a silent candlelight vigil to protest the Pope's stand on the ordination of women. Meanwhile, 53 nuns were conducting a night of prayer, which followed, according to a nun from Florida, "two and three hours a night praying for what we were going to do." Whatever *were* they going to do?

Seems the next morning John Paul II was to address 5,000 nuns at an early mass at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The opening remarks would be made by Sister M. Theresa Kane, president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. She wore a grey tweed suit. Quoth she, to the Pope:

It is appropriate that a woman's voice be heard in this shrine. . . . I welcome you sincerely, I extend greetings of profound respect, esteem and affection. . . . With the sentiments experienced by Elisabeth when visited by Mary, our hearts, too, weep as we welcome you. . . . I urge you to be mindful of the intense suffering and pain which is part of the life of many women in these United States. I call upon you to listen with compassion and to hear the call of women who comprise half of humankind.

As women, we have heard the powerful messages of our church addressing the dignity and reverence for all persons. As women, we have pondered these words. Our contemplation leads us to state that the church in its struggle to be faithful to its call for reverence and dignity for all persons must respond by providing the possibility of women as persons being included in all ministries of our church. I urge you, Your Holiness, to be open to and to respond to the voices coming from the women of this country who are desirous of serving in and through the church as fully participating members.

Half the audience burst into emotional applause. The other half appeared to sit on their hands.

His Holiness responded by reading his speech, the text of which had been out about a week. Just before he began, 53 nuns, all wearing civilian clothes, rose and stood through the speech. He spoke of Mary, who

is not mentioned as being at the Last Supper

where, of course, the eucharist was instituted. As a more appropriate place than the eucharist for women to involve themselves in the Church, he spoke of the contribution of women in Catholic schools. He urged devotion to "Christ, your spouse." And he exhorted them on attire: "It is not unimportant that your consecration to God should be manifested in the permanent exterior sign of a simple and suitable religious garb."

Outside the shrine, the Pope was greeted by 25 men and women with signs reading

SEXISM IS A SIN: REPENT!

and

IF YOU CAN'T ORDAIN WOMEN,
DON'T BAPTIZE THEM

A New York Times/CBS News Poll taken just after the Pope's visit and released in November revealed that American Catholics support the availability of abortion at a percentage only slightly lower than among Protestants. In response to the proposition "The right of a woman to have an abortion should be left entirely to a woman and her doctor," 64 percent of the Catholics polled agreed. Sixty-nine percent of Protestants agreed. Catholics disagreeing were 32 percent, compared to 27 percent among Protestants.

The same poll showed that 40 percent of Catholics now favor the ordination of women, only 10 percentage points below the approval among Protestants. Had the Pope's remarks affected Catholic views on this subject? Apparently so. While there has been no slippage in the percentage of support since the last Times/CBS poll two years ago, the percentage of Catholics opposed to women in the clergy had jumped from 45 to 55 percent, diminishing the "undecided" category.

A 1979 Gallup Poll also showed Catholic support for women's ordination at 40 percent, against 36 percent in 1977 and 29 percent in 1974.

Academics Protest

A month after the Pope hit Chicago, 180 Catholic educators hit back with a statement registering their "regret" over the Pope's "vision of a monolithic church" and his "closed model of hierarchical authority." They went on:

The Catholic Church in America is one of rich diversity, of pluralism in not only ethnic heritage, but also in critical opinion. There has developed in the Church a spirit of tolerance for public discussion and reasoned dissent on many issues, such as priestly celibacy, birth control, homosexuality, divorce, and the ordination of women. We do not regard this diversity as a threat to truth, but rather the authentic means by which to discover fuller truth.

The academics are associated with 18 institutions and include at least four members of the faculty at Jesuit School of Theology. Jesuits have been silenced on the

subject of women's rights in the Church since an order six months ago from John Paul II.

Crackdown on Jesuits

Also in November, John Paul extended his gag on Jesuits, telling Pedro Arrupe, the Father General of the Jesuits, to remedy their "regrettable shortcomings" and "secularizing tendencies." In its place, he demanded "doctrinal orthodoxy in full fidelity to the magisterium of the Church and the Roman Pontiff." Over the years, Jesuits have developed a reputation internationally for providing the theoretical foundation for the church's involvement in social and political issues.

And Rev. William J. Callahan, Jesuit head of an activist community near Washington, DC, was silenced for openly advocating the ordination of women.

In Rome, Rev. Edouard Shillebeeckx, a prominent Dominican theologian, was facing an ecclesiastical trial for his recent book on Jesus. He faces the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, until recently called the Holy Office of the Inquisition. The name was changed by Vatican II, and trial procedures were later reformed by Pope Paul VI. Until the reforms, specific charges and those making the charges didn't have to be identified. Now they do, but John Paul II didn't bother. The Vatican has violated the new procedures, according to Dr. Nicholas Patricca, who heads the religion department at Chicago's Mundelein College. Patricca was joined by at least 73 members of the faculty at Mundelein, a Roman Catholic institution, in signing the protest on papal intolerance. Now, the group says it will protest the heresy trial.

BISHOPS LIKE SEXIST LANGUAGE

In a surprise outcome, American Bishops voted in November to keep sexist language in human references in the central prayers and liturgy of the church. The vote, at the semiannual meeting in Washington of the National Conference of Bishops, rejects such substitutions as "all people" for "all men." It seemed to represent the influence of the Pope's recently stated views.

Two votes on the issue won strong majorities but fell short of the necessary two-thirds.

"This was the most minimal step they could make," said Sister Mary O'Keefe of the National Association of Women Reli-

gious, and quoted in the *New York Times*. "They are totally unaware of what this is all about. I will refuse to go to mass and take communion anywhere they say 'all men' in the prayer."

Methodists won't rehire lesbian

Joan Clark, fired last April by the Women's Division of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries after she announced that she is a lesbian, was again refused rehiring by the division by a 49-12 vote at its Fall meeting. But Ms. Clark *did* pick up the support of the National Council of Churches' Commission on Women in the Ministry. They passed a resolution that said, "We resolve as her sisters on the Commission on Women in Ministry to continue to be in solidarity with her in our ongoing struggle to confront homophobia in all churches."

Back at the Methodist Global Ministries Women's Division, a move to institute a non-discriminatory hiring policy with regard to sexual orientation was delayed for a year, so that the church's legislative body, the General Conference, can first institute an employment policy for the whole church when it meets in April, 1980. The division did, however, accept a report from an eight-member task force on sexuality, which goes to the General Conference for a vote. The report urges the church to resist "easy moralisms or dogmatic views which set up different views regarding the normalcy of sexual behavior of heterosexuality and homosexuality."

And the division voted to petition the General Conference to delete two policy statements negative to homosexuality. One, a phrase from the church's Social Principles, reads, "... though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. . . ." The move to delete the phrase passed 40-25. The second, passed 39-26, called for deletion from the Book of Discipline of Paragraph 906.13, which makes the General Council on Finance and Administration responsible for seeing that no board, agency, committee, commission or council "shall give United Methodist funds to any 'gay' caucus or group, or use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality."

Christian Century changes tune

There's news from the distinguished offices in the building that stands next

door to the one housing, humbly enough, *TGC* on Chicago's Dearborn Street. It seems that *The Christian Century* has published two articles favorable to gay Christians. That's new for the sometime ecumenical gadfly once revered for its courageous civil rights advocacy since the magazine has been edited by President Carter's Illinois campaign operative, Jim Wall. Wall has published numerous hair-raising editorials and articles in the *Century*.

First, there was Virginia Mollenkott's "Joyful Worship in the Midst of Danger," ecstatically describing UFMCC's 1979 General Conference (it's reprinted in the October/November, 1979 *IN UNITY*). Then, there was a long piece called "Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality," by Walter Wink, who teaches at New York's Auburn Theological Seminary and at the Hartford Seminary Foundation.

If understood correctly, according to Dr. Wink, the Bible does not prompt us to ask "What constitutes a breach of divine law in the sexual realm?" but rather "What constitutes obedience to the God revealed in the cosmic lover, Jesus Christ?" Said Wink in the November 7 issue, "The Bible knows only a love ethic, which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in any given country, or culture, or period." Behind the legal tenor of Scripture, he observes, there is an even deeper tenor telling us that God sides with the powerless and liberates the oppressed.

Mormons bar ERA ERA advocate

In December, the Mormon Church formally excommunicated 43-year-old Sonia Johnson, an organist who actively supports ERA. The Virginia Bishop of the LDS who served as judge in her trial, a lay leader who works as a personnel officer of the Central Intelligence Agency, denied that Johnson was axed over ERA. The formal charges were "disrupting the missionary efforts of the church" and "preaching false doctrine."

He declared, "You testified that you believe and have publicly stated that our society, specifically including church leaders, has a 'savage misogyny' when in fact it is church doctrine that exaltation can be gained only through the love that results in the eternal bonding of man and woman." The "savage misogyny" part was evidently too much for the bishop, whose verdict it was that she was "not in harmony with

church doctrine concerning the nature of God in the manner in which He directs His Church on earth."

"I can't stress to you how hard they're working against the amendment," Johnson told reporters. "Almost the whole strength of the church is turned against the ERA. And it certainly threatens them when you go out into the states, as I have, and publicize what they are doing. What they're doing is very underground. They are politically powerful."

AND MORE . . .

Well, John Paul II showed those radic-lib types a thing or two as we were going to press. Just while they were still steaming about Shillebeeckx, he slapped a censure on that flashy, popular moderate, Hans Kung. Europe's best-known theologian was prohibited from teaching. At first the Vatican wasn't sure whether officials of the Roman Catholic Church in West Germany would actually remove Kung from his post as professor of dogmatic and ecumenical theology and director of the institute of ecumenical research at the University of Tübingen. But finally they did, complying with the order from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome.

And the Mormons weren't the only ones to can an ERA advocate. So did fringe-right Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Patricia Gundry, whose new book *Woman Be Free! Free to be God's Woman*, and whose pro-ERA stand, riled Moody officials, doesn't work at Moody. But her husband does. Or did. Robert Gundry has never written or lectured on feminism in or out of school. But if you asked him, he'd tell you what he thought. So they fired him, issuing the only statement they've made on the subject: "The position of Dr. Gundry and his wife regarding the feminist movement and, therefore, the role of women in the church is objectionable to the administration and trustees of the Moody Bible Institute, and is the basis of his resignation."

Among Moody alumnae/refugees is Letha Scanzoni, who told the *Chicago Tribune*, "Ultra-conservative Christians are threatened because some of us are reading and re-examining the Bible in a different way. A maverick within your group is far more threatening than being presented with a difference from the outside."

With any luck, the action at Moody will drive a few more talented Moody escapees into the welcoming arms of UFMCC. They won't be the first. —fjd

Second Seminarian Conference

Respectability at Harvard

WHEN I WAS asked to write about the Second Lesbian and Gay Seminarians Conference (November 8 - 11) at Harvard Divinity School, I felt uncomfortable. I tried all different kinds of ways of getting out of it. In the meantime, I came to terms with some of the reasons why I did not want to deal with the conference. And I realized that my misgivings about it might well be worth writing about. They have to do with our relationship, as UFMCC, to our brothers and sisters in other denominations. And they have to do with the ever-present tensions between lesbians and gay men. I decided to face them and try to write.

A little history is needed. The First Lesbian and Gay Seminarians Conference was held at Union Theological Seminary last Spring. It was planned almost entirely by MCC folks, and the conference was infused with the spirit of our Fellowship. Workshops were informal. The keynote speeches were given by friends - Sandy Brawders and Bill Johnson. The worship service, in which I celebrated communion, was informal, too. We all sat on the floor. We all cried. (I was crying so hard as I consecrated communion that I could barely talk. I got a lot of help from my friends.)

At the end of the weekend, we knew that something incredible had happened. We were shocked by the pain level throughout the conference. Brothers and sisters who had been isolated on seminary campuses for years came from as far away as California to share their pain; to be comforted. Again and again we heard people from mainline churches wrestle with the devastating choice they were forced to make between integrity and ordination. We held each other. We laughed. And at the end, during that worship service, the Spirit moved among us in a powerful way. The pain we felt for ourselves and each other was released. The dingy room we sat in was filled with a sound which I think resembled the sound of seventy people speaking in tongues. But it was not a sound of words at all; not even unintelligible ones. It was the sound of our sobs and laughter, alternating, ripping us apart and releasing us. Like I said before, we held each other. Brothers holding sisters.

Sisters holding brothers. We felt a tremendous hope, along with the pain. We shared our brokenness, in the breaking of the bread and it was no longer a burden. We could go on, renewed. At the end, the Harvard people said they would sponsor the next conference.

I needed to write about that first conference because the second one was so very different. And I am still trying to figure out why. There were some differences that are easy to talk about. The conference registration was nearly twice as large - about 150. The program was a thirty-five page booklet instead of a single mimeographed sheet. The speakers were mostly "famous" people long since graduated from seminary - Laud Humphries, Paul Shanley, Ralph Blair. There were press conferences. The setting, being Harvard, was much more formal.

My keynote speech was scheduled for Friday morning. I registered for the conference and went into the designated classroom to speak. Probably about a third of the hundred or so people there were women, and I found myself addressing them. This was strange, for me. I am used to preaching to a congregation of similar size and gender proportions and I always preach to everybody. Yet here, at Harvard, I found myself addressing my sisters. It freaked me out a little. I wondered if this was an indication of how the rest of the conference would go.

It was indeed. I did a workshop that afternoon; a panel with seven men. The energy level was low. I began to get worried in earnest. In the meantime, women who had met each other at last year's conference began to come together. There was considerable joy in these reunions; a momentum of ecstatic sisterhood began to build which reached a height of intensity during the Friday evening plenary session. Susan Savell, a UCC minister who sang at the General Conference in Denver, came out publically for the first time. She spoke to us words out of the depth of herself/ourselves. She sang the incredible songs she had written about her journey. We women went wild. It was clear that she was singing to us, and we responded. The men - well, they listened.

Saturday started out with more unity.

A sister sang songs and an Indian brother named Eaglefeather told stories. He was beautiful, reverent, tender. A play by Pat Lichte (an exhorter in MCC/New York) was performed and she was able to see it for the first time. There was shared celebration. Yet afterwards we dissolved again into the endless, mostly male-oriented workshops. At 4:30 pm the women met with women and the men met with men. A sister who had worked on the conference shared her experience of being on a planning committee with four men. She cried. We held her. Every woman in the room identified with her pain. She talked about how deeply she felt the pain of her brothers and we identified with that, too. But there was no resolution in sight. Sometimes it all looks impossible, and this was one of those times. In the end, we could only celebrate the beauty and power of each other. We held each other in a circle and sang "Song of the Soul" by Chris-Williamson. And we prepared ourselves for the worship service that evening. We were up for it; we needed to worship.

The worship service was very unlike the one so many of us had shared seven months earlier at Union. A formal Harvard chapel. Robes. Processions. No spontaneity. Male imagery for God. It was not until the sermon, however, that women began to walk out. I was about the ninth woman to leave. I was disappointed and angry. Other women followed. I think I would have enjoyed communion, if the rest of the service had not been so intolerable. Pat Lichte stayed, and she said there was considerable joy there. Then, too, there was the pain of the sister who had cried in the women's group. A different pain this time; she is a Catholic woman and served communion for the first time in her life. Perhaps it was also the last time, given the position of her denomination. She is an incredibly gifted woman who is not ordainable simply because she is a woman. I think that I realized the full implications of that for the first time, meeting her. The world sure is strange.

I believe we have some things to learn from all this. First of all, bigger is not necessarily better. The overwhelming number of workshops and plenary sessions and special events at the Harvard conference served only to divide us. They did not facilitate what all of us most needed: a sense of unity and shared struggle and celebration. Perhaps it is the size of UFMCC, I am thinking, which helps to allow for that peculiar, wonderful sense of

community which continually emerges out of our diversity. I would not like to see UFMCC get too large too fast.

Secondly, it is apparent to me that the trend toward "professionalism" and "respectability", both at Harvard and now within UFMCC, can serve to alienate some of the most creative forces among us. Certainly it serves to divide gay men and lesbians. The gift we as UFMCC have to share with our brothers and sisters in mainline denominations is not easily described, but surely it has a lot to do with our poverty, our lack of respectability, and the freedom that comes from being outside the structures which preach (male) professionalism.

I have been working on Ecumenical Relations for the Fellowship for some time now. The more I talk to brothers and sisters in mainline denominations, the more I thank God that I have been called to UFMCC. Our brothers and sisters in mainline denominations are systematically isolated; they are divided by the power games of the hierarchy from which they must seek approval and legitimation. The rules of the games they must play are different for men and women; it is very hard to work together. Everyone grows increasingly demoralized.

There is a tendency both within and outside of UFMCC to think of the Fellowship as an "unprofessional" people who must seek to become "professional."

Ruether is resource for TGC July conference

AS WE GO TO PRESS, THE GAY CHRISTIAN IS PLANNING A CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF FAITH, THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY. MAJOR RESOURCES FOR THE CONFERENCE INCLUDE THEOLOGIAN ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER. FRIENDS AND CONTRIBUTING EDITORS OF TGC WILL PRESENT PAPERS AND PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSIONS. SAVE THE DATES: JULY 18 AND 19, IN CHICAGO! MORE DETAILS IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

There is a tendency to think that we need to look and act more like our counterparts in mainline denominations. (I saw a lot of three-piece suits in L.A. this summer. And I remembered that I first felt comfortable in MCC because I could wear my jeans to worship services.) I worry that we might throw away the best parts of who we are. Jesus would not worry about being professional. Jesus would not wear three-piece suits.

In any church at this particular time in history there are going to be tensions between men and women. I believe that our style in MCC makes it possible to live through these tensions and come out loving each other, valuing each other's particular gifts. This has got to keep happening among us, this brothers-holding-sisters, sisters-holding-brothers. It doesn't seem to be happening much anywhere else.

—Karen Ziegler

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When Jesus saw her, He called out to her, "Woman, you are free." And He placed His hands on her, and at once she straightened herself up and praised God." (Luke 13:10-13).

Do not remember the past, do not call to mind what is finished; for behold I am doing a new thing; it is about to blossom; can you not see it?" (Isaiah 43:18).

Taking sides with life is not an easy or simple thing. It involves a never-ending process of change whereby we constantly renounce the self that is dead and enamored of death and instead become free to love life. (Dorothee Soelle, in *Death by Bread Alone*).

Getting whole: a communal affair

A Meditation by Steve Carson

THE STORY OF a cripple--of a life distorted for eighteen years, not able to be who she was--a person distorted. An important story for me. I stand here as that cripple. And you--the people of this church--have said to me, "You are free from your sickness." You have clued me into the fact that there is in fact no sickness in me. Any sickness is located somewhere else.

The healing words of Jesus have been spoken to me by the people I have known. As cripples together, we speak to each other the healing words. We touch each other. Together we speak to each other the good news . . . the gospel.

An amazing power. The power the New Testament tries to describe. The power of Christ. The power of God. The gift of God--ours to give to each other.

My journey of the last year has been one of claiming identity. It has not been an easy journey. Like all of us, I grew up in a culture that is homophobic, that has erased my history, that has made my identity invisible, or horribly twisted and distorted.

But I am rapidly finding my way out of that maze. I am naming the demons. I am identifying the poisons that have been given me. I am listening carefully to the quiet voice within me.

As that journey progresses, the questions change. Over the summer, after a rather intense first year at Union Seminary, I found myself settling in, consolidating my understanding of myself and of the world. I noticed within myself a shift in terror--a shift from the long-standing terror

of the question "Who am I?" to the new terror of the statement "This is who I am." It's only very recently that the terror has subsided. I've realized that for me it is a simple matter of getting used to being gay. And recognizing that the terror has its source in the world outside me, and that the world is much more frightened of me than I am of it.

The questions change. This culture, by denying us our rights, by denying us healthy affirmative models for ourselves, by denying us even a language for who we are, keeps us facing the adolescent question of "Who am I?" long past adolescence. I am painfully aware of how many of our people never get past that question.

But those of us here face different questions. Questions of adulthood. Questions of what we do with our identity. Questions of intimacy. Questions of love, of relation.

It is very complicated. I doubt any of us here would say we have the "Who am I?" question all sewn up. It is a lifetime question. And all of us here are at different points on that journey.

But the journey continues. And the questions we face together are questions of relation, intimacy, and love. For me, those questions come to me as "Now that I have a voice, what do I say? Now that I can walk, in what direction?"

This church has kept me focused. It calls me into community. It offers me the environment both for identity and for relation. It calls me out of myself, yet it echoes back to me who I am.

The struggle for my identity is the struggle for our identity. The struggle for my relating is the struggle for our relating. The personal is the social. I depend on you. And Jesus saw her, placed His hands on her, and said, "Woman, you are free of your sickness."

I come to the questions of relation, of intimacy, as a man. Let me say that again: it's important. I come to the questions of relation, of intimacy, as a man. The power of healing we have--the power of God-in-Christ--gets blocked over and over again by many factors, barriers of race, of class, of age. But for me one of the most painful barriers is the one that we set up between us as men.

Coming out is just the beginning. That first step, which seems to cover light years, only defines the territory through which we will now walk. In a book that came out this year, a woman describes her journey of developing a positive gay identity. Her words describe an image that in an uncanny way articulates how I see myself with men. She writes that after coming out,

*The struggle was not over, however. In my fantasies I had longed for intimate connections with women, but when I began to meet many lesbian women I found to my surprise that the old program was still operating. I was often afraid of them. Or, more correctly, I was afraid of the feelings they aroused in me even though there was no longer any reason to deny those feelings. The interplay of past and present, fantasy and reality. Making friends with these women was like making my way back through a mine field that I myself set. I had to be very cautious for fear I might be destroyed. The old program was very strong in me, and from the outside it looked very different. My cautiousness was seen as aloofness, my manner was interpreted as condescending and rejecting. Insight did not often catch up with experience, and I felt alienated from the very people I wanted so much to accept me. It was an exceedingly painful part of the coming out process. It still is. **

Amen. I don't know about anyone else, but I've spent twenty five years setting up that "mine field."

Steve Carson is a second year student at Union Theological Seminary, New York. These reflections were presented in a service at MCC/New York, where he is a member. His article, "Please, No Spectators," appeared in the special "Coming Out" issue of Christianity and Crisis last June.

A disturbing image. But let me share some good news. We are created in the image of God. And the Spirit of God is at work in our lives, and in our struggle to reclaim what that means.

As a white man, that means moving out of something. It means leaving something. It means leaving privilege.

Coming out means sharing vulnerability. It means shattering something. For me it means shattering the shell around me -- a shell called self-sufficiency, a shell called the need to dominate, to be in control. In sharing vulnerability we allow others to see the chink in the armor, to see some of our pain. That invites mutuality. It is a pre-requisite for love.

Loving is hard. Men loving women, women loving men, women loving women, men loving men. None of it is easy. In fact, *any* breakthrough of love in a culture like ours strikes me as a miracle, a gift of grace. We need support.

And we're only going to get it from each other. There is little support from relatives, from the institution of marriage, from the straight churches, from co-workers.

We cannot afford to avoid intimacy. We need to re/construct it. We cannot fall victim to it! We need to give new meaning to the word love, beyond its sexist and heterosexist distortions. We need to give meaning to love that is not compromise, abuse, or denial . . . love that transcends the cultural foundations of homophobia and misogyny. Love that is free, that can bend a little, that is not frightened.

Do not remember the past, do not call to mind what is finished; for behold, I am doing a new thing. (Isaiah 43:18).

I am convinced that the Spirit of God is at work in our movement. The good news is gay. It brings to us liberation. It brings to us the love of God . . . a love that will not be bound.

And I bring the good news that the gospel, while being gay, is not the exclusive domain of our community. God is indeed doing a new thing. There are men and women in our lives we can count on, straight folks whose reality I have entered, who have shed tears over our struggle, who see themselves violated by that which oppresses us.

The good news breaking through. Relation breaking through. Identity breaking through. Incredible. The power of Christ refusing to be contained, shattering myths.

Our movement is about shattering myths. Shattering the constraints we place upon ourselves, on our power to relate.

It's funny. There is a radical power in shattering myths: Once one is gone, others tend to shatter, too. Coming out is the shattering of myth. It is an intensely theological process. And it is not limited to the gay and lesbian community.

For me that is a hard statement to make. Coming out is first and foremost a gay process. For me to extend that process to non-gay people is a risk. Gay goes right down to my bones. It is a way of seeing the world, a process of building a life in a world that wants us dead. But if coming out signifies a breaking through, in claiming who you are, then we need to create the space that invites others. It is a matter of leading each other through this uncharted territory.

Oppression and injustice is worldwide. So is the movement for liberation. The victory of the people of Nicaragua is probably one of the most hopeful things I have come across in a long time. Talking with a woman who had just returned from Latin America, I thought seriously about going there to join in the reconstruction efforts.

Then I realized that *that* isn't necessary. Our piece of the struggle is right here.

These questions of identity, of intimacy, of commitment, come home to us in this church. Church is the place that acknowledges the depth of who we are. It is one of the few shared spaces we have, that exists solely to be shared.

Some one asked me recently where I get my support. A good question. I realized that at this point in my life it comes from many sources. Boundaries are unclear. I'm aware of how tricky that is. We tend to see our support as neatly channelled. Love fits into certain categories. But I think we are all beginning to realize that those categories reflect a real fear of love. They make unrealistic demands upon certain individual relationships. Even our closest relationships need room to breathe; a community; a context of openness. We are together too rich a resource to cut ourselves off from each other.

And Jesus saw her, and touched her. We need to touch each other. We are called to shatter the silence of the affirming word not spoken, the fear not expressed, the touch withheld.

Church offers us a shared language of deep experience. Its symbols motivate us, giving us a frame work for being and acting in the world; giving us a framework for community. We live out of the biblical witness. We speak of God, and of grace.

We are part of salvation history.

Add to that the radical fact that we are a self-identifying lesbian and gay people. According to all odds, we should not be here. But, lo and behold, we are here. We are not dead. I don't say that lightly. Moreover, there are straight folks here -- a special treasure. According to all the odds, they should not be here. But, lo and behold, here we all are.

We need to seize that radical fact. We need to hear each other clearly and honestly. We need to create together. To reclaim the meaning of our symbols, of what it means to be people of God. The Spirit is moving here, moving through the symbols. Church is for me where Spirit and World come together, revealing God in the struggle, in the search for justice, in the openness to love.

I know God from this church -- from the words Karen speaks, from our brokenness, from our abundant life. I find God in the terror of breaking through, in finding ourselves and each other. We yearn for wholeness. It is the basis of our faith. And our yearning for wholeness finds a response. In that response I know God.

There is a sacrament in shared struggle: the sacrament of solidarity. In that sharing is God. A brother wrote to me in a note a sentence that helped me understand that: "I find truth in naming who we are in each other's lives -- that is a true liturgy for me."

A woman, sick for eighteen years. Jesus saw her. He called out to her. He touched her. He spoke to her. And at once she straightened herself up and praised God.

Yes -- that power, God's power -- ours to give to each other.

The good news is that in spite of all the odds, love has survived. We struggle for justice so that we may love. We struggle for freedom so that we may love. Love does not threaten -- it calls forth.

The good news is the power we have: to heal, to touch.

We can choose what it is we will embody. We can embody fear, anger, hurt. Or we can choose to embody the gospel. The gospel is a never-ending process of change whereby we constantly renounce the self that is dead and enamored of death, and instead become free to love life.

The Spirit of God is in this place, in each of us here. That same Spirit that created and creates the world -- that Spirit that says to us, "We are free." That Spirit that is always breaking into our lives.

Behold, I am doing a new thing, it is about to blossom; can you not see it?

As others see us

JOHN R. FRY and CAROL ALICE FRY live in Eugene, Oregon, where they not only receive, but read, *The Gay Christian*. As if that were not serious enough, they edit the frying pan, a monthly tabloid devoted to providing "an authentic Christian witness outside the jurisdiction and authority of the Christian church." John, from 1960 until 1965 an editor of *Presbyterian Life* (now called *A.D.*), became the center of a cause celebre as pastor of Chicago's First Presbyterian Church during the late 60s. When First Church joined The Woodlawn Association in a ministry with Chicago's black street gangs—which included successfully collecting in the church's vault weapons surrendered by warring gangs that had terrorized Woodlawn—the Chicago Police began harassing both Fry and the church. The church was raided several times by police, who faked photos showing illegal activities in the church. Armed with the photos and equally fake witnesses, Senator John McClellan of Arkansas called Fry before his infamous Senate subcommittee in an investigation *Christian Century* called a "kangaroo court." When Fry stepped up his attack on the racist and repressive police-state policies by which, he argued, Mayor Daley and his machine had contributed to the violent despair of the Woodlawn ghetto, the police harassment, too, was escalated. Until, as the folks at First Presby say, Fry was being followed around and intimidated. One day in 1969, he abruptly removed from the city. During his years in Chicago, his views of ministry, preaching, and the church were radicalized by the confrontation of the untoward realities of the aching world he saw and the promise of the Gospel he believed. His books include *The Immobilized Christian* (1963), *Fire and Black-*

By John and Carol Alice Fry

stone (1969), *Locked-Out Americans* (1973), *The Trivialization of the United Presbyterian Church* (1975), and *The Great Apostolic Blunder Machine: A Contemporary Attack Upon Christendom* (1978).

THE GAY CHRISTIAN, which describes itself as "a journal of theological reflection from Metropolitan Community Church," originated in the Northeast District of the church, and from August, 1975 until August, 1979 appeared as a distinct entity in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches' (UFMCC) *In Unity*, which describes itself as a "news and opinion magazine."

The Gay Christian now will be published separately by UFMCC. *In Unity* no longer will be burdened with controversial materials; it will have a new editor, too.

Jean Gralley, an interim *In Unity* editor, has tried to put a good face on the decision. She writes in the October/November issue:

Being committed to the work of the Commission on the Laity of this Fellowship, I strongly feel our people embody a special quality in MCC -- as in the early church, as in any church, the people represent diversity in unity. There is tremendous life in that diversity. It is any family's life-energy, but most especially our own. When we do not reflect that diversity, we are in trouble.

The recent furor over The Gay Christian is not so much an attempt to narrow the spectrum of our diverse points of view as it actually evinces that our spectrum has not been wide enough. Perhaps if both conservative and liberal views had a more equal footing, that is if the Fellowship publication more energetically reflected the Fellowship's diversity, one side might not have found itself at the throat of the other. Meanwhile, what The Gay Christian is and has always meant to be has been almost entirely obscured.

Maybe so. What Jean Gralley herself has obscured, however, is the plain fact that theological reflection -- read "controversial subject matter" -- will no longer

appear with news and opinion. News and opinion will hereafter be safe. Lay persons will be safe. They can read up-beat, inspirational, unthreatening, UFMCC-serving materials; they won't have to muck around in theological reflection.

Which is a shame. Because it betrays the very nature of the UFMCC. As we read the materials which created the ruckus and the negative responses to these materials, the issue is literalism. That is what makes the decision of the Board of Elders so discouraging. The very existence of the MCC depends on the faith of Christian people that God's love is not conditioned, especially by sexual preference. The Bible does in fact say that God's love is not available to unrepentent practicing homosexuals. The literal words of Romans and 1 Corinthians say that. To be in MCC, even for there to be one, requires a reading of the Bible that understands these condemnatory words as culture-bound, or as plain wrong. Make room for literalism in the UFMCC and you have set about destroying it.

Literalism is not selective. If people believe the Bible is word-for-word inspired, then all the words are inspired, not some of them. These people can't hold out for the literal truth of the Genesis creation accounts and then dodge the literal truth of Romans 1. Yet the members of the clergy of Southeast District came perilously near to that very selective literalism in a letter they wrote to *In Unity* (August/September):

... [W]e believe the Board of Elders and the editors of In Unity and The Gay Christian should consider the deleterious effect of running articles of obvious controversial and perhaps even heretical content. And, while agreeing, as our District Coordinator says: "We should be able to think and hear unthinkable thoughts," and while it would seem appropriate that growth experiences be present within our denominational publications, it does seem totally inappropriate to officially release (even with a disclaimer) speculative theological arguments that call into ill repute Biblical authenticity, and the clearly stated Doctrine of the UFMCC, and smacks, as one Elder says, of "both paganism and heresy."

The Reverend Stan Harris of Baltimore concurs with such a view. In the same issue, he wrote:

... [G]ods, goddesses, etc., have no place in the Christian scheme of things and are totally irrelevant as arguments against Divine Revelation or its relationship to us as a Christian people. Theologically, "Yahweh" is the only God, without beginning and without end, the "Prime Mover and Spirit of the Universe." ... To dismiss Genesis as a mere Chauvinistic plot to discredit women is to twist the theme of things; God involved directly with Humanity; Humanity disobeyed and forfeited their right to walk closely with God, hence Humanity needed redemption. To argue over it and throw in a non-existent mother goddess is no more than crying over spilt milk.

Mr. Harris expresses the notion that the Genesis creation accounts must be preserved because they guarantee the original sin without which redemption doesn't make a lot of sense. He thinks Karen Ziegler's article threatens the Christian message of salvation. This goes beyond the belief of Southeast District clergy, who conclude that Karen Ziegler merely threatens "Biblical authenticity."

The South Central District conference won't have any of that beating around the bush, holding back, and so forth, so prominent in Stan Harris's and the Southeast clergy's letters. No, sir. They come out with the blunt question itself:

Does this article correctly reflect the theological stance of UFMCC? If it does, why are we calling ourselves a Christian church? Are we Christ-centered, and do we uphold the Bible as the inspired word of God, or do we not? If the article does not correctly reflect our stance, why does it appear in In Unity?

As avowed, practicing Presbyterians, we often run into this kind of thinking. Our church has a big bunch of conservatives. They are notorious letter writers. They are always condemning paganism, heresy, rationalistic humanism, critical reading of the Bible, women's lib, and, especially and most savagely, homosexuals. Had Karen Ziegler's article appeared in A.D. magazine (the denominational magazine for the UPCUSA and the UCC), they wouldn't have been content with less than the editor's hide. UFMCC conservatives differ from Presbyterian conservatives only in the fact that one displays homophobia and the other is victim. It certainly is an irony, isn't it?

Now there is the germ of a special analytic we might use in Karen Ziegler's article itself. Accordingly, we might

consider the possibility that the ruckus over the article was produced by her attack on the patriarchal character of the Genesis creation accounts more than the mere fact that she was rejecting traditional theological understandings of the material. These are men-folks yelling at Karen Ziegler after all. And, as Donna Wade, who edited *In Unity* when Karen Ziegler's article appeared, the women who have joined the men folks have had plenty of years of social programming in which to become male-identified. More than biblicism (selective literalism), it was probably sexism in the UFMCC that drove a wedge between theological reflection and denominational calm - otherwise news and opinion.

The article of Karen Ziegler's is entitled "Creation Myths: Bridge to Human Wholeness." Here is a sort of reprise of her main theme:

All of the Old Testament creation stories were in some way a polemic against the goddess, and so against women. They worked. We have been believing them, on one level or another, for thousands of years. The worshippers of the male god Yahweh and/or his son have had to repeatedly call upon the original fabrication in order to legitimize their rejection of all that is female, dark, and/or sensual. There is finally something very unconvincing about all this righteous battling for light, maleness, and dry unmessy rationality.

Fine. It was sexism all along which, with the eventual victory of patriarchy over matriarchy, got transposed into the interrelations of the deities. Yahweh's eventual victory over Hathor, Pythia, Nina, Kali, Ishtar, Astarte, and Inanna is a way of saying that his followers had successfully subjugated women on earth. The creation stories presuppose the oppression of women by men. That being the case, Ziegler argues, "an end to patriarchy would mean not a reinterpretation of the Yahweh of the Bible, but an end to this father god." Of course. Speaking as a really ticked-off Christian woman, she moves one step further:

If the Bible records a continuing battle to suppress female religion, and thereby to oppress women, unless we come to understand biblical religion in a radically new way, there is no hope for real change. Again this is the pain of social revolution or conversion. It is a slow and lonely process. Our entire sacred story needs to shift. We need to start telling new stories...

Although Ziegler regards Merlin Stone's (When God Was a Woman) and Jaquetta Hawkes's (Dawn of the Gods) evidence rather more uncritically than she probably should, she has put together the archeological evidence with the evidence from comparative religion in a good blend. It is possible to demonstrate with both kinds of evidence: the probability that worship of various female deities was widespread throughout the mid-east in the fourth and third millennia B.C.E.; the invasion of northern savages (Hyksos?) with their male god marked a religious turning point no less than a political turning point for the region, there was a regular confluence of serpent, goddess, and tree motifs in the pre-Yahwistic religions of the mid-east; the Genesis accounts resemble in many ways the Babylonian Enuma Elish saga, in which the male Marduk vanquishes the female Tiamat (Bible readers unfamiliar with the material would be astonished at the resemblances, in fact).

Feminist theologians and feminist biblical scholars generally are not prepared to argue from such evidence that the Genesis accounts were in historical fact composed to feature the victory of Yahweh over all goddess worship. Karen Ziegler does make that argument. At least one feminist theologian, Rosemary Ruether, suggests that though the case cannot yet be made as clearly as Ziegler has made it, the case is there to be made and will be made.

So, let's not be looking for some escape route from the force of Ziegler's conclusions along the lines that after all she is just an uppity young woman, barely out of seminary and what does she know blahblah? She knows plenty and her article is a good one. Only that historically configured mush of anti-intellectualism, conservative theology, and patriarchal arrogance could dismiss it as pagan and heretical.

Karen Ziegler was surprised that her article could produce such a brouhaha. She was hurt, too. She responded to her critics in the August/September issue of *The Gay Christian* (still appearing in *In Unity*):

We can no longer afford the kind of religious bigotry which allows us to think there is some easy kind of distinction between "pagans" and "Christians." What do we mean by "pagan" anyway? Do we mean the quiet gentle worshippers of the Earth Mother who lived in Canaan until the Israelites arrived in the

"promised land" and murdered and raped them? Do we mean the American Indians who lived in harmony with their God until the European Christians arrived in this country and slaughtered them? Do we mean those Africans who were sold into slavery by Christians? Do we mean those millions of women who were burned at the stake by the Church during the Middle Ages? Or the gay men ("faggots," remember) who served as fuel for those flames? All of these people were called "pagan." Yet again and again in the Bible we find that God is on the side of the despised ones. God hates injustice and rape and murder.

The editor of *The Gay Christian*, F. Jay Deacon, says straight out that he is not going to apologize, retract, or take back a thing. He is proud to have run the article and he promises that *The Gay Christian* will not be silenced.

Presbyterian. The way the UFMCC has acted after the publication of Karen Ziegler's article discredits the church's own history and tarnishes its promise. We hope the act is reversed -- for the sake of Christianity itself.

An Update from the Editor: Some facts about what's happened since the split.

The original Board of Elders vote to split the magazines last Summer was something less than definitive (2 yes, 1 no, 3 abstentions). So were its effects. The General Conference issue of *IN UNITY* ran, under TGC's banner, responses to criticism of Karen Ziegler's article by the Editor and the writer. The rest of what was supposed to be TGC ran, in altered form, as a "Letters" section of *IN UNITY*. The TGC banner's appearance

don't want them. If most MCCers are in fact bound and determined not to transcend the kind of thinking that stifled John Fry in the United Presbyterian Church and that can't stand having articles like Karen Ziegler's appear in their church magazine, then we can't make them read TGC. And, we're in lots of trouble.

Second, the Board of Elders saw a constituency for TGC beyond UFMCC. One of the original factors drawing this editor into MCC in the first place was a copy of the old, separate TGC which I found in a Boston seminary library and nervously tucked inside a copy of *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* so as not to let anybody know what I was so avidly reading! TGC needs to find its way back to many of its former readers who just aren't interested in UFMCC's in-house news, in *IN UNITY*. We'd thought the combined magazines could have had an even greater potential.

THE SPECTACULAR AND AUDACIOUS CLAIM OF THE UFMCC IS THAT IT IS A DIFFERENT AND NEW CHRISTIAN CHURCH, CREATED SPECIALLY BY GOD TO PORTRAY ALL OVER AGAIN THE ORIGINAL AND RADICAL DIVINE SUMMONS TO LOVING COMMUNITY AND LOVING SERVICE TO THE WHOLE ACHING WORLD. UFMCC MEMBERS BELIEVE THIS PASSIONATELY, WITH GOOD REASON. THEY HAVE FOUND GOD'S LOVE AND IT IS GREAT. THE OCCASION FOR OUR SADNESS AND DISAPPOINTMENT LIES JUST THERE. THE UFMCC CAN'T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS. IT WILL BE DIFFERENT AND NEW AND DARING OR IT MIGHT AS WELL BE PRESBYTERIAN. --John R. Fry

Well, surprised and disappointed as we were with the low quality, institutionally anxious patriarchs of the UFMCC, we were delighted with the high quality, definitely anti-patriarchal support for Ziegler and *The Gay Christian* which surfaced after her article. People who want to stigmatize the UFMCC as a bunch of sort of Pentecostal flakes (who are also mostly gay and lesbian) ought to read the letters in the August/September issue of *In Unity*, especially The Reverend Valerie Bouchard's and The Reverend Shelley Hamilton's.

The spectacular and audacious claim of the UFMCC is that it is a different and new Christian church, created specially by God to portray all over again the original and radical divine summons to loving community and loving service to the whole aching world. UFMCC members believe this passionately, with good reason. They have found God's love and it is great.

The occasion for our sadness and disappointment lies just there. The UFMCC can't have it both ways. It will be different and new and daring or it might as well be

was permitted by a last-minute decision by the Elders to reconsider their first vote, since several members of the BOE didn't think the group had had adequate information for an intelligent decision.

By October, the Elders felt themselves more prepared to make a final determination. After conferring with us on October 16, they voted 5 yes and 1 abstention to reconfirm the division. We'd recommended a survey of our readers' views before taking such an action. We're still not convinced that there is overwhelming sentiment among MCCers against receiving the magazines together. But the BOE thinks there is, and in this, we believe they are sincere. It would, however, be somewhat shattering to us to know for certain that most MCCers are as anti-intellectual, intolerant, dogmatic, and threatened by bold thinking as the Elders' decision seems to assume.

Two additional factors must, however, be underlined.

First, you can't cram magazines, even good ones, down the throats of people who

But, given the flack generated by the publication of the Ziegler article, some *IN UNITY* readers were just not going to allow those hopes to be realized. TGC has a most urgent ministry. Somehow, TGC has got to be free to fulfil it. And that, I hope, explains the Elders' vote.

We want you to know about some very hopeful developments since the to-split-or-not-to-split hoopla.

Jean Gralley, always one of TGC's most loyal friends (and most talented contributors), will, beginning next issue, be TGC's very own graphics person. She has moved to Detroit, just across the lake from our editorial offices in Chicago. We are ecstatic.

Incidentally, it may have appeared from John Fry's article that Jean supported the splitting of the magazines. In fact, she opposed it.

And Dr. Judith Plascow has been requiring students in her Wichita State classes to read Ziegler's *Creation Myths* article in TGC!